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Quelques échos de Robert Frost, d'Elizabeth Bishop et d'Emily Dickinson dans la prosodie de Seamus Heaney

Fanny Quément

- 1 Echo as a physical phenomenon and a poetic device is central in Heaney's work, but the same could be said about many other poets. What makes Heaney's approach to echoes slightly more specific is that he was dedicated to the activity of "sounding". The word is strikingly repeated with a subtle modification at the end of the first section of "Gifts of Rain", in which an anonymous countryman is introduced as a figure of the poet:

He fords
His life by sounding.
Soundings. (Heaney 1972, 13)

The switch from a singular form to a plural one suggests there are different kinds of soundings, just like there are more than one kind of poetic echo. To "sound" is to give forth sound waves, to auscultate and to probe, and Heaney explains in "Station Island" that the sounding forth of his own poetic voice relies on a series of "echo soundings". His soundings are as much about sounding forth as about sounding down.

- 2 In "Station Island", a long poem composed of twelve sections, the writer traces the path of an alternative pilgrimage away from processions. At the end of this path, along which he has encountered many a ghost, he meets that of James Joyce. The latter gives him a final advice:

You lose more of yourself than you redeem
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim

out on your own and fill the element
 with signatures on your own frequency,
 echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements,
 elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea. (Heaney 1984, 93-94)

- 3 In Joyce's words as imagined by Heaney, the phrase "signatures on your own frequency", which implies the necessity to find an individual poetic voice, is immediately followed by "echo soundings", which suggests that Echo helps the poet navigate safely on the literary sea. These echo soundings could be: rhyming schemes or any sound effect based on repetition (such as alliteration, assonance or paronomasia), echoes of words within a poem, within a collection or between collections – but I believe they are also echoes of other poets produced by a voice that finds its singularity in a plurality.¹ These lines can indeed be read as a concise poetic rewriting of what Heaney had developed ten years earlier in his lecture entitled "Feeling into Words"² as an answer to the question "how does a poet find his voice?":

In practice, you hear it [your voice] coming from somebody else, you hear something in another writer's sounds that flows in through your ear and enters the echo-chamber of your head and delights your whole nervous system [...]. And your first steps as a writer will be to imitate, consciously or unconsciously, those sounds that flowed in, that in-fluence. (Heaney 1980, 44)

- 4 This paper hopes to detect such echoes by tracing some sound effects back to their origins in order to show how Heaney's prosody sounds other poetic voices. In accordance with Heaney's definition of the poetic voice in the same lecture ("it may not even be a metaphor, for a poetic voice is probably very intimately connected with the poet's natural voice, the voice that he hears as the ideal speaker of the lines he is making up", Heaney 1980, 43), prosody will be understood not only as the work on metre, rhythm, stanza forms or rhyming schemes, but also as the attempt to transcribe changes in volume, intonation, diction or pace—features often associated with the physical voice performing a poem rather than with the printed text. The main issue with the object of this study is that it is often quite hard to tell whether the lines you are reading can be considered as an echo of such and such author, or if the echo exists only in the echo-chamber of your own head, in which the possibility of a resonance is pre-determined by several factors. The detection of echoes depends indeed on how the reader's ear has been trained and tuned; it can be influenced by the reader's own wish to hear two of their favourite authors engaging in a canon, and it is often followed by a feeling of uncertainty not only as regards the deliberateness of the echo, but also as regards its very existence.
- 5 A poem by Emily Dickinson perfectly stages the situation in which academics are when working on prosodic echoes. It begins with the line "I know some lonely Houses off the Road" and echoes multiply while Dickinson imagines two robbers quietly breaking into one of these houses guarded by the Moon and Chanticleer:

The Moon—slides down the stair,
 To see who's there!
 There's plunder—where—
 [...]
 Screams Chanticleer
 "Who's there?"
 And Echoes—Trains away,
 Sneer—"Where"! (Dickinson 134)

- 6 A close reading of these lines will show how complex and plural echoes can be. Instead of merely repeating the question asked by Chanticleer, they answer it with a sneer

suggesting no one ever broke in, no one ever plundered anything. At the same time, they are genuine echoes in so far as these lines do repeat “who’s there” and “where”. Or, do they? The move from an indirect interrogation to a direct question in direct speech evokes a voicing out rather than a mere repetition, an echo with a change between an inner voice and the exterior world to which Dickinson lends her own voice. But what matters most is that hearing something that sounds as if it could be an echo in a Heaney poem often feels like being a robber and a keeper in one. On the one hand, an echo constitutes an intrusion on the part of another author who suddenly breaks into the poem, interfering with Heaney’s own frequency. On the other, the reader might be the one who is breaking into the poem, projecting onto it what they want to hear. In the end, when hearing such echoes, they are indeed left with the two questions “who’s there?” and “where?”. Whose voice am I hearing? Heaney’s or another poet’s? Shouting back “where”, echoes escape, claiming they are not here, there is no one else but the author, they are “Nobody—too” (Dickinson 133). But in doing so, the echo persists. So where exactly is it? Can it be in the poem’s sounds only? In its syntax and the way it impacts rhythm and tone? Doesn’t meaning also influence the perception of a sonic echo?

- 7 I will tackle these questions in a study of Heaney in relation to three American poets: Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, and Emily Dickinson. As regards the first two, there is evidence in Heaney’s essays that their voices are amongst the ones thanks to which he found his own frequency. The case of Dickinson is slightly more problematic as Heaney never published any extensive work on her. This paper nevertheless aims at showing that even though it is hard to prove the existence of deliberate echoes from her work, or even the existence of an influence, hearing echoes of Dickinson in Heaney’s work can help renew our reading of Heaney and our understanding of his prosody. Studying these three cases of prosodic echoes will be an opportunity to show how Heaney’s poetic ear got tuned to American voices, how he ventriloquised and answered them. I will argue that Heaney’s work echoes Frost, Bishop and Dickinson in three ways that constitute three modes³ of echoing: echo as a mirroring in the case of Frost, as an evocation in the case of Bishop, and as a cleaving of the poetic self with Dickinson. Following these three steps, this study should go beyond the mere spotting of echoes to show that Heaney elaborates a lyricism based on echo-sounding or echo-location as a way to pitch or place his voice and to guarantee the flexibility of his lines. Some conclusive remarks have therefore been gathered around the idea of a polyphonic prosody.

Mirroring Frost

- 8 There is something dubious in borrowing a word from the lexical field of vision (mirroring) when dealing with a sonic phenomenon. However, this paradoxical choice is due to the blending of hearing and vision on which culminates “Personal Helicon”, the last poem in Heaney’s first collection *Death of a Naturalist* (43), which tells of Heaney’s sensory exploration of the wells around Mossbawn. Even though “Personal Helicon” is dedicated to Michael Longley, the poet echoed here is not Longley but Frost. Longley is therefore the explicit addressee of a poem that doesn’t name its source but makes it perceptible, implicitly, in its theme as much as in its sounds. Refusing narcissistic contemplation, Heaney discovers his poetic self in echo and as Echo:

To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
 Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
 To see myself, to set the darkness echoing. (Heaney 1966, 43)

- 9 Although the last lines focus on Heaney's self, this sound portrait turns out to be more than a self-portrait. Knowing how much Heaney was imbued with Frost's poetry and prose as early as the 1960s (Buxton 39-57), it is hard not to think of Frost's own poem on wells, "For Once, Then, Something" (Frost 208) in which the speaker manages, once, to discern something white in the depths, beyond the surface of his reflection. The face of Frost therefore hovers over that of Heaney in "Personal Helicon". Rachel Buxton noted the resemblance (42-43) and I am extremely indebted to her work, but her own line of inquiry makes her move swiftly on to other poems going beyond what she considers to be "simple imitation" (43), without elaborating on the poem's prosody. It is precisely this dimension I want to look at in order to show that this "imitation" is not only thematic but also sonic. Due to copyright policies, the texts cannot be reproduced entirely here but the reader will easily consult them elsewhere.
- 10 Both poems describe similar situations: bending over a well to try and see beyond the surface. Similarly, prosodic echoes are to be heard beyond apparent, superficial formal differences. The fifteen—not fourteen—lines of "For once, then, something" don't rhyme but find a sonic consistency in the constant return of the semi-vowel [w] ("never seeing / Deeper down in the well than **where** the **water**...", "**what** was that **whiteness**?") and in the repetition of "once" (in the title, in the last line and at the beginning of the seventh line, that is to say towards the middle of the poem) which starts with the same semi-vowel. Even though Frost's well isn't said to make any sound (contrary to Heaney's) this eminently visual poem ("shining surface picture", "looking out of a wreath", "I discerned") is also a sound event in itself thanks to these prosodic features.
- 11 "Personal Helicon" is composed of five rhyming quatrains, but this scheme hides another pattern: it is combined with sound effects reproducing the phonetic mark imprinted on Frost's poem. As you can see below, the same semi-vowel [w] makes its meandering way through the noisy consonants of the first stanza characterised by its alliterative and onomatopoeic Heaneyspeak,⁴ "the snap-crackle-and-pop of diction" (Hobsbaum 37):

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
 And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
 I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
 Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss. (Heaney 1966, 46)

- 12 The repetition of "one" along the next three stanzas replaces that of "once" in Frost's poem. The words "others" and "one" also appear in initial position but in a kind of inverted echo as "one" comes first: "One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top" is followed by "Others had echoes, gave back your own call" in "Personal Helicon", while "For Once, Then, Something" begins with "Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs" and then goes on with "One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple". Heaney's poem mirrors Frost's and contrasts with it at the same time, rhyming and trying to see beyond the whiteness and into the dark. Whereas Frost questioned that whiteness, Heaney concludes "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing", and his imperfect rhymes such as the one between "reflection" and "one" or the *deibhidhe* rhyme⁵ between the stressed [ɪ] of "spring" and the unstressed one in "echoing" suggest the poetic self emerges in slightly differing echoes. It seems that some sounds flowed in and fed a reflection on what it means for something to be unique or personal.

- 13 Echo sounding can here be conceived as the emission of a signal by Heaney. This signal hits a poetic ground and returns to the emitter (himself) with something identifiable, a sound mark that can be reproduced and that helps Heaney place his voice in relation to that of another poet. In the case under study, the mirroring echo shows an identification with Frost and the reproduction of a prosodic feature from one poem, but not yet the perfect integration of something central in Frost's prosody, namely the "sound of sense" or "sentence sound" (Frost 665).⁶ This is exemplified best in *Station Island*. Quoting from "Sweeney Astray", Rachel Buxton notices that the bird "relearning / the acoustic of frost" can be seen as a figure of the poet making room for Frost's voice to resonate in his work. But what Heaney imitates then is not so much Frost's voice itself as Frost's ability to shape his lines so that they transcribe the rhythms, intonations and colloquialisms he has heard.
- 14 "Personal Helicon" is a major Heaney poem in the way it turns a well into a music instrument, the helix of which mirrors that of the human ear, but Buxton is probably right to read it as "undigested Frost" (Buxton 42). In the absence of sentence sounds, the mirroring does not produce the presence of Frost's vocal print. One has to turn to other poems, less obviously alluding to Frost, to hear how these sounds flowed in. It is the case for instance in the seventh section of "Station Island" in which the couple's dialogue may remind some readers of "Home Burial", all the more so since the ghost appearing in that section is that of an athlete – the poet's "next of kin", to borrow a phrase from Frost's essay on poetic form and athletic shape, "The Poet's Next of Kin in College" (768-772). Inspired by local, familiar voices, many of Heaney's lines seem to put into practice Frost's advice, "Gather your sentences by ear and reimagine them in your writing" (Frost 665). These are moments when echoing is no longer a reproduction but an evocation, an allusion that calls up a spirit by imitating a poet's phonic signature instead of reproducing a prosodic feature specific to one poem. As I want to stress the variety of the voices echoed by Heaney I will now focus on the evocation of Bishop rather than on that of Frost, but some of the following examples will nevertheless illustrate Heaney's handling of sentence sounds.

Evoking Bishop

- 15 In this context, evocation is to be understood not merely as an allusion but as the calling up of a spirit under its vocal form, for Bishop's poetic voice haunts Heaney's works. In his essay "Counting to a Hundred: On Elizabeth Bishop" (Heaney 1995, 164-185), Heaney elaborates on Mary McCarthy's idea that Bishop's mind was a mind "hiding in her words, like an 'I' counting up to a hundred" (165). Bishop's lyrical subject would thus suddenly surface as it lists and interrogates the objects of the world behind which it hides, and it seems that she is still playing hide and seek amidst Heaney's lines.
- 16 His sestina "Two Lorries" (Heaney 1996b, 13-14) can, for instance, be considered as an echo-sounding of Bishop's own reticently elegiac "Sestina" (Bishop 123). "Two Lorries" pictures a nineteen-forties mother busy around her stove (like the grandmother in "Sestina") and sweet-talked by a coalman driving from Magherafelt to Mossbawn, the very road that was taken by another lorry on its way to plant a bomb in the waiting room of a bus station in Magherafelt. The poem ends on a vision of Heaney's mother and the coalman as revenants (although none of them died in the attack). Heaney seems to travel two roads in one and one would not be surprised if on the way the raindrops falling on

the little Mossbawn stove turned into dancing tears as in Bishop's sestina. But there is much more in common between the two poems than the loss of a mother closely associated with a domestic interior. When retracing the composition of his sestina, Heaney insists first on a problem of transmission: "The material was still exerting pressure, but the signal had jammed" (Heaney 2008, 362). It was only when this signal hit Bishop's lines and brought something back from them to its emitter that the writing of "Two Lorries" could be resumed. As Heaney explains, he let Bishop's "repeated end-words take [him] wherever they wanted" (Heaney 2008, 362). His echo-sounding was therefore a sounding of the poetic form rather than of the sestina's theme or meaning.

- 17 It is through sound that the incantatory sestina exerted its influence, and it is also a sound, one phoneme, a shout rather than a word, that resounds in the echo-chamber of "Two Lorries": right at the centre of the circling lines, the fourth stanza begins with an interjection that is reminiscent of another poem by Bishop, "In the Waiting Room" (159-161), especially if you remember that the bomb attack referred to in "Two Lorries" took place in the waiting room of a bus station. This exclamation ("Oh, Magherafelt!") oscillates between two lyrical tones, that of an enthusiastic reminiscence, and that of the "oh! of pain" which plays a central part in "In the Waiting Room":

[...] the bolted Lorry
 Gets revved and turned and heads for Magherafelt
 And the last delivery. Oh Magherafelt!
 Oh dream of red plush and a city coalman
 As time fast forwards and a different lorry
 Groans into shot [...]. (Heaney 1996b, 13)
 Suddenly, from inside,
 came an oh! of pain
 —Aunt Consuelo's voice—
 not very loud or long.
 I wasn't at all surprised;
 even then I knew she was
 a foolish, timid woman.
 I might have been embarrassed,
 but wasn't. What took me
 completely by surprise
 was that it was me:
 my voice, in my mouth. (Bishop 160)

- 18 Just as in Bishop's poem the interjection "oh" can be attributed to the aunt in the dentist's room or to the child growing anxious in the waiting room, the "oh" echoed in "Two Lorries" can be heard as Heaney's or Bishop's. At that moment, the poetic voice of Bishop is evoked by Heaney's incantatory words and the doubling of the "oh", which is repeated in the following line, can thus be heard as a split of Heaney's poetic voice sharing the lines, making room for his predecessor.

- 19 Retrospectively, a bracketed remark in the second stanza takes on another dimension:

[...] This time the lode
 Our coal came from was silk-black, so the ashes
 Will be the silkiest white. The Magherafelt
 (Via Toomebridge) bus goes by. The half-stripped lorry
 With its emptied, folded coal-bags moves my mother:
 The tasty ways of a leather-aproned coalman! (Heaney 1996b, 13)

In this stanza, the specification "Via Toomebridge" may sound incidental. Some would read it as a means to root the poem in the local, while others might be tempted to

consider it as mere padding out. However, readers familiar with Bishop know that what is between brackets should never be overlooked.⁷ Indebted to a poet who was fond of maps, Heaney takes the time to map the bus line his poem is about, and the toponym Toomebridge indicates, via homophony, that a contact with the dead has been established as if the river Lethe had been bridged. The evocation had already started there.

- 20 Like so many other critics (Fan 47; Edelman 187; Nesme 93),⁸ Heaney was sensitive to Bishop's use of parenthetical remarks. "Counting to a Hundred" shows his eagerness to rely on the same process, giving an illustration of it at the very moment when it is explained: "As so often in Bishop's work, the parenthesis (if you have ears to hear) is the place where to hear the real truth" (Heaney 1995, 184). The first truth to be heard here is that readers must be all ears. Moreover, the sentence seems to imply that parentheses go with a lowering of a voice suddenly verging on silence, like a murmur. However, brackets can also attract the reader's attention to the words they embrace, thus working like amplifiers. A parenthesis is therefore a mock murmur comparable to an aside in a play. As such, it contributes to the pitching and staging of the poetic voice.
- 21 Other Bishopian brackets can be spotted in Heaney's works. In "Glanmore Sonnets, IV" (Heaney 1979, 31), Heaney recalls how, as a child, he would lie down on the ground with his ear on a train track, trying to perceive the vibrations of approaching trains. But he "never heard that" (Heaney 1979, 31) for the soundwaves were not where he expected them to be:

Two fields back, in the house, small ripples shook
Silently across our drinking water
(As they are shaking now across my heart)
And vanished into where they seemed to start. (Heaney 1979, 31)

The soundwaves cannot be heard on the tracks but can be seen troubling the surface of the drinking water in a container away at home, and heard in the poet's lines with their rhymes, repetitions and modulations. Similarly, the emotional heave does not flow throughout the text but is contained by the brackets. The lyricism of this sonnet therefore relies on the building of an acoustic space where echoes can occur. The fact that the train's approach can only be perceived in the house and not on the tracks shows the benefits of distance and difference, and maybe the reason why Heaney's echo-sounding of Bishop works so well is that their poetic voices are so different. The distance and the difference between the two authors guarantee the dynamics of the echo. Hence the necessity to examine a third mode of echoing: the cleaving of the poetic self.

Cleaving the poetic self with Dickinson

- 22 There is not much about Dickinson in Heaney's prose, but he does mention her twice in his Nobel lecture, *Crediting Poetry*. The first occurrence (Heaney 1996a, 14) recalls regretfully his mistrust of her as a poet whose semantic opulence went against his Northern Irish earnestness (Burris 62). He admits having missed something in her work, "crediting insufficiently [her] crystalline inwardness" (Heaney 1996a, 14), and explains how he became sensitive to the crystalline sound of this inwardness which he calls a lyrical "ring of truth" (Heaney 1996a, 50-51). Interviewed by Dennis O'Driscoll, he unobliquely alludes to Dickinson's line "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—" when he writes "There's such a thing as truth and it can be told—slant" (O'Driscoll 467). Yet there is not much more about her in his published works, and when asked if he was alluding to her

when writing about “river in the trees”, he answers not only that no allusion could be intended since he didn’t know her use of the phrase, but also that he is not sure “whether to be happy or unhappy about it” (Driscoll 289), a perfect example of an unintended echo born in the echo-chamber of the reader’s mind. While Michael Longley kept re-writing a poem entitled “Emily Dickinson”, the link between Heaney’s poetry and that of Dickinson is not obvious. One might therefore wonder why Maria Stuart counts Heaney amongst the poets who “responded” to Dickinson’s poetry and helped transmit it to the generation of Muldoon and McGuckian (Stuart 81). Borrowing from Tom Paulin (1983), Stuart argues that Heaney and Dickinson share a cultural project, namely the “encroachment” of the vernacular into the English line (Stuart 85), and this goes along with a prosodic project.

- 23 In fact, there is at least one passage in the whole corpus of Heaney’s published prose suggesting that Dickinson’s prosody impacted him as much as that of Christopher Marlowe, John Milton or Wallace Stevens:

The affective power in these places [*Doctor Faustus*, *Paradise Lost* or “The River of Rivers in Connecticut”] comes from a kind of veteran knowledge which has gathered to a phonetic and rhythmic head, and forced an utterance. It is, for example, the undermusic of just such knowledge that makes Emily Dickinson devastating as well as endearing [...]. (Heaney 1995, 135)

According to Heaney, what all these authors have in common is what he calls an “undermusic”, a tonal and tonic quality which is as much about ethics than about aesthetics (Heaney 1995, 134). The idea of a deeper music running under the surface of apparently metrical lines is particularly relevant in the case of Dickinson with her reworking of the hymn stanza and her use of dashes. I now hope to show that Dickinson’s undermusic unexpectedly resurfaces in Heaney’s poetic works, and that this implies a cleaving of the poetic self, that is to say a division and a union at the same time.

- 24 As noted by David-Antoine Williams in his article on antagonisms (words that can mean two contrary things at the same time), both Dickinson and Heaney play with the antagonistic meanings of the verb “cleave” (Williams 169-177) which Christine Savinel beautifully renders in French with the association of two paronyms, “coupure-couture” (Savinell 1993, 111-113). “I felt a Cleaving in my Mind—” is the first line of poem 937 in Johnson’s edition:

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind—
As if my Brain had Split—
I tried to match it – Seam by Seam—
But could not make them fit.
The thought behind I strove to join
Unto the thought before—
But Sequence unravelled out of Sound
Like Balls, upon a floor. (Dickinson 439)

- 25 As Williams explains (170), the meaning of “cleaving” is left uncertain till the end of the first stanza due to the pluperfect of the second line (the speaker could have experienced a feeling of re-union after their brain had split). This poem resists logic in so far as it is about a matching that can be experienced, felt, even though it seems impossible. Heaney’s even shorter poem “A Haggling Match” adds a link in the sonic chain of the unravelling sequence:

Axe-thumps outside
like wave-hits through
a night ferry:

you
whom I cleave to, hew to,
splitting firewood. (Heaney 2006, 62)

- 26 Williams brilliantly analysed the semantic disruption caused by the grammatical parallelism between the two verbs “cleave to” and “hew to” (Williams 176). Major prosodic disruptions can also be noted. Indeed, such splitting of the lines is very uncommon for Heaney, especially in the way it isolates the pronoun “you”, a kind of Dickinsonian addressee whose gender and exact function remain undetermined, for there is nothing in the poem suggesting this “you” is necessarily Heaney’s wife. Heaney might as well be cleaving to Dickinson or any other of his predecessors whom he tends, incidentally, to associate with boats as he does with T.S. Eliot and Ted Hughes in “Stern” (Heaney 2006, 46).
- 27 Other echoes between the two poets can be heard as so many unlikely punctual matches achieved beyond apparent difference. One could be tempted to oppose the presumed abstractness of the Protestant Recluse of Amherst to the concreteness of the Irish bard from a Catholic background, thus feeding reductive—though partly grounded—conceptions of the two poets, whereas they show affinities. Acknowledging the possibility of a lineage might lead to a revision of the conception of Heaney’s prosody as formal and conservative compared, for instance, to the “disruptive aesthetics” (Brearton 32) common to Longley and Dickinson. After all, Heaney and Dickinson shared a passion for the instability of wet lands: the former felt “betroted” to the hybrid bogs he loved to “unsettle” as a child, “treading the liver-thick mud” (Heaney 1980, 19), while the latter knew the “rapture” of losing her shoe in a swamp (Parks 6), seminal experiences that have to do with walking and can be associated with both poets’ dismantling of the foot as a metrical unit.
- 28 The echoing of Dickinson’s undermusic—understood as the flowing of free cadences undermining the meter of hymns—is particularly striking in Heaney’s unusually extensive use of the dash in *District and Circle*⁹ and the way this collection makes room for pauses. In the last poem, “The Blackbird from Glanmore”, this bird closely associated with the Irish poetic tradition is glimpsed from a car. “I park, pause, take heed”, writes Heaney, and as he pauses his poem borrows as much from Dickinson’s American voice as from Irish poetry. The image of the blackbird “filling the stillness with life” is superimposed with that of Heaney’s little brother who died in his fourth year:

A little stillness dancer—
Haunter-son, lost brother— (Heaney 2006, 75)

This poem, which cannot be scanned metrically, echoes Dickinson’s words in “Because I could not stop for Death”, “I heard a Fly buzz—when I died” or “I cannot dance upon my toes”, as well as her pauses, these moments when language seems to fail without ceding to silence. Thus, it echoes both words and, even more importantly, the pauses between the words as a way to tone down and open up the voice once more.

- 29 Moreover, these lines can attract the reader’s attention to the impact of parataxis on prosody. Heaney’s use of parataxis seems indeed to be the one device that the dashes made manifest in *District and Circle*. An earlier poem entitled “Wheels within Wheels” ends on the memory of a circus show with the lassos of some cowgirls wheeling in. The last two lines are paratactic:

Perpetuum mobile. Sheer pirouette.
Tumblers. Jongleurs. Ring-a-rosies. *Stet!* (Heaney 1991, 47)

Jugglers and pirouetting dancers are amongst the figures that people Dickinson's world, and Heaney shares in her interest in the circumference, following Joyce's second advice to "keep at a tangent" (Heaney 1984, 93) so as to be oblique in his own way. In these lines from "Wheels within Wheels" the full stops function like dashes cleaving the line and contributing to the vividness of the hypotyposis. The units they separate are not only semantic but rhythmical, and the use of the Latin word *stet* can be read as a defence of metrical erring. The word *stet* is used on proofs when the author wants to signal that something has been corrected whereas it shouldn't have been considered as a mistake. Hence, the rhythmic and phonetic head of this sequence seems to force a final exclamatory utterance claiming a right to err. Exclamations are rare in Heaney's work, and the use of a word belonging to the technical vocabulary of editing as an interjection might reveal some unease similar to what Stuart calls Dickinson's "impatience with the fixity of print and a liberating ambition to make a primal reality of the spoken word" (Stuart 88). It also reveals a wish for words to be pure and free sound: Heaney is probably aware that many readers won't know the precise meaning of the word, although its closeness to "stay" makes it evocative. More could be said about the affinities existing between Heaney's and Dickinson's works, but this would lead us away from prosody whereas it is time to draw to a conclusion.

Heaney's polyphonic prosody

- 30 As with Frost and Bishop, the study of the third mode of echoing points to the idea that Heaney's written lines build an acoustic favourable to the oral. I would therefore like to conclude with the reading of a sonnet from *Field Work* in which such an acoustic can be found. Although the presence of Wordsworth is overwhelming in "Glanmore Sonnets, III" (Heaney 1979, 30), it is regrettable that this sonnet sequence is sometimes still read exclusively as a piece written under the influence of Wordsworth with a return to the iambic pentameter. "Glanmore Sonnets, III" shows a complex polyphony in which the allusions to Wordsworth are balanced by the calling up of the three American voices studied here. Firstly, the Bishopian parenthesis "(So much, too much)" is essential to understand the irony of the first two lines ("This evening the cuckoo and the corncrake / (So much, too much) consorted at twilight") and the rabbits and deer are observed from a distance like the creatures in "The Moose" or "The Armadillo", two of Bishop's most famous poems. Secondly, the dialogue included and the tones contrasted there constitute an example of lines gathered by a Frostian ear:

I had said earlier, "I won't relapse
From this strange loneliness I've brought us to.
Dorothy and William—" She interrupts:
"You're not going to compare us two...?" (Heaney 1979, 30)

Thirdly and finally, this sonnet is reminiscent of Dickinson, who is also the author of a poem opposing her provincial voice to the song of the metropolitan cuckoo:

The Robin's my Criterion for Tune Because
I grow—where Robins do—
But, were I Cuckoo born—
I'd swear by him— (Dickinson 131)

- 31 As echoes multiply in Heaney's sonnet, the breeze may be not so much that of the *Prelude* as Dickinson's "disassembling Breeze / That hints without assuming—" (556), a prolonging of her own voice precisely described as multiple and theatrical by Christine Savinel (2009,

85-99). The singular form “breeze” hides a multiplicity revealed by the attribution of the plural “cadences”:

Outside a rustling and twig-combing breeze
Refreshes and relents. Is cadences. (Heaney 1979, 30)

The last line is cleaved by a full stop that disrupts the metre in favour of new cadences. Even though it can be scanned as an iambic pentameter it includes a transgression of the rules of written English inviting not to read the line as iambic.¹⁰

Refreshes and relents. Is cadences.

x / x x x / x / x x
o B o b o B o B o b

This transgression consists in placing a full stop between the verb and its grammatical subject, and it goes along with something grammatically odd but not totally uncommon, namely the attribution of a plural noun (“cadences”) to a singular subject (“breeze”). In terms of rhythm, the full stop works as a cue to fully stress the copula “Is” instead of leaving it unstressed (as metrics requires). The plural “cadences” then produces a final effect of echo: its last unstressed syllable faintly echoes “Is”, so that the last words, set apart by the full stops, seem to form an endless loop. Thus, Heaney’s poetic voice frees itself from metre while promoting a new dynamics based on rhythms and subtle internal rhymes. Playing with punctuation and grammar, he unhinges the units of the iambic feet so as to offer cadences that are more Frostian than Wordsworthian to the reader’s ear. The word “cadences” was actually used by Frost in his letter on the sound of sense: “if one is to be a poet he must learn to get cadences by skillfully breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the metre” (Frost 665). It is unlikely that Heaney was alluding to Frost here, but his cadences do echo Frost’s.

- 32 This sonnet is probably one of Heaney’s most polyphonic pieces, but it reveals a dimension present throughout his work. Heaney constantly hints to other poets, dissembles, differs from himself or rather from the common idea of a quintessential Heaneyness, blending Heaneyspeak with ventriloquy so as to find a third voice. It is therefore by cleaving his poetic self when cleaving onto other poetic voices that he can pitch his lines. Like a bat using echo location to find preys, he feeds on the authors he can sound, but without gulping them all. Instead, his voice welcomes theirs and his first person singular proves to be plural without any trace of anxiety. Based on echo soundings, Heaney’s lyricism is open to dialogism.

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NOTES

1. One could think of Jean-Luc Nancy's "singularité plurielle" ("plural singularity"). See Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, Paris, Christian Bourgeois, 1986, 73.
2. A lecture given at the Royal Society of Literature in October 1974 and published in 1980 in Heaney's first collection of essays, *Preoccupations*.
3. These three modes of echoing should *not* be seen as three steps in the development of Heaney's poetic voice. They co-exist in poems or collections from different periods. My goal is not to develop a chronological approach to the development of the poetic voice but to offer a typology of prosodic echoes.
4. The word "Heaneyspeak", coined by Philip Hobsbaum, originally referred positively to the characteristic features of Heaney's early style, which Hobsbaum relished. However, it quickly became a word applied to lines in which Heaney seems to parody his own style, ratifying too obviously his poems with his big phonic signature. In 1995, Linden Peach sees it as that "self-conscious style with its over-reliance upon alliteration and onomatopoeia" (see Linden Peach, *Ancestral Lines: Culture and Identity in the Work of Six Contemporary Poets*, Bridgend: Seren, 1992, 62), and Terry Eagleton points to "a typical piece of lushly over-fanciful Heaneyspeak" in his scathing review of Heaney's *Beowulf*, the title of which parodies such Heaneyspeak (see Terry Eagleton, "Hasped and hooped and hirpling: Heaney conquers Beowulf", *London Review of Books* Wednesday 3rd November 1999: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/1999/nov/03/seamusheaney>).
5. The *deibhidhe* is an Irish poetic form in which stressed syllables are rhymed with unstressed ones. See Eleanor Knott, *An Introduction to Irish Syllabic Poetry of the Period 1200-1600*, Cork: CUP, 1934, 18-19.
6. It is in a letter to John T. Bartlett, dated July 4th 1913, that Robert Frost defines what he calls sometimes "sound of sense", sometimes "sentence sound". This letter is quoted by Heaney in an uncollected essay on Frost. See Seamus Heaney, "Above the Brim: On Robert Frost", *Salmagundi* 88/89 (Winter-Autumn 1990-1991): 282.
7. A most famous example is the parenthesis "(Write it!)" at the end of "One Art" (Bishop 178), which plays on the homophony with *right it* and suggests that a loss is indeed a disaster while the villanelle is supposed to prove the contrary.
8. No exhaustiveness can be claimed here. This short list simply reflects the readings that marked the author of this article as regards Bishop's use of brackets.
9. I didn't deem it necessary to count all the dashes that can be found in all the collections Heaney published, but there are forty-eight occurrences of this punctuation sign in *District and Circle* (2006) against nine in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), sixteen in *North* (1975) or twenty-three in *Field Work* (1979). Heaney's last collection, *Human Chain* (2010) counts twenty-nine instances. What matters most, however, is not so much the amount of dashes as the way they are used and their concentration in poems such as "Moyulla", "To Pablo Neruda in Tamlaghtduff" or "The Blackbird of Glanmore".
10. The following scansion is based on Derek Attridge's rules as exposed in *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, with x and / marking respectively unstressed and stressed syllables, while o, B and b stand for offbeat, beat and promotion. See Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, London: Longman, 1982.

RÉSUMÉS

Seamus Heaney, poète de l'écholocalisation (« echo sounding » dans *Station Island*), composait ses vers de sorte qu'ils sondent les tourbières sans fond et d'inépuisables trésors de mots dont il tirait une musique nouvelle. Cet aspect de son œuvre est bien connu des lecteurs comme des chercheurs. Cependant, une autre forme d'écholocalisation est en grande partie restée hors sonar : l'art de faire allusion à un autre poète par la prosodie. Bien qu'Écho n'ait pas de voix à elle, c'est à son appel que Heaney répond dans « Personal Helicon », échappant ainsi au destin de Narcisse : « To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring / Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing ». Il est important de noter que ce portrait sonore n'est pas qu'un autoportrait car « Personal Helicon » fait écho au poème de Robert Frost « For Once, Then, Something » sur les plans thématique et prosodique. De nombreux échos de ce type peuvent être repérés chez Heaney. Cet article propose d'analyser, à partir d'exemples précis, trois modes d'existence de l'écho poétique : l'écho-miroir, l'écho évocateur et l'écho cliveur qui scinde et assemble en même temps. Nous montrerons ainsi comment l'oreille poétique de Heaney s'est accordée et a répondu à trois voix poétiques américaines : celles de Robert Frost, d'Elizabeth Bishop et d'Emily Dickinson. La voix nord-irlandaise de Heaney, qui était aussi un amoureux des ondes radio, leur fait tant d'échos que sa bande de fréquence s'en trouve élargie.

Seamus Heaney, a poet dedicated to “echo soundings” (the compound is used in *Station Island*), wrote lines that probe bottomless bogs and inexhaustible word-hoards to dig up new music from them. Readers and researchers are familiar with this aspect. However, another form of echo sounding has remained rather off the academic sonar so far: the art of alluding to another poet through prosody and sound effects. Even if Echo has no voice of her own, it is her call that Heaney answers in “Personal Helicon” (the last poem in *Death of Naturalist*), thus refusing to follow the path of Narcissus: “To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring / Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing”. Interestingly enough, this sound portrait is more than a self-portrait. Indeed, “Personal Helicon” echoes Robert Frost’s “For Once, Then, Something”, not only because of its theme (wells), but also because of its sounds. Many echoes of the kind can be heard in Heaney’s works. This paper will illustrate and examine three different modes of echoing: echo as a mirror-effect, an evocation and a cleaving. It will be an opportunity to show how Heaney’s poetic ear responded to American voices such as those of Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop and—maybe the least obvious example—Emily Dickinson. Heaney, a voice lover and a broadcaster, echoed them all in his Northern-Irish voice, thus broadening the range of his “own frequency” (again from *Station Island*).

INDEX

Keywords : echo, lyrical subject, lyricism, poetic voice, prosody

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AUTEURS

FANNY QUÉMENT

Fanny Quément, normalienne, agrégée d'anglais et docteure de l'université Sorbonne Nouvelle, est chercheuse et traductrice indépendante.